

[Gulf Road]

W14999 Conn. 1938-9 GULF ROAD Mr. & Mrs. Marsh

"Go see Mr. and Mrs. Marsh, up on the Gulf Road," I am told; "they're the oldest couple around here. Close to ninety, both of them, maybe more than ninety."

The Gulf Road is that upper highway which is one of two approaches to the village from Thomaston; it is favored by residents of the upper part of the community as the most direct route to their homes, but since the hurricane of last fall the bridge crossing Northfield brook just past the branch of the highway has been down, it is necessary now to take the longer way and this situation is the cause of considerable grumbling.

The few houses scattered along the Gulf Road are in consequence more isolated and out of touch with the remainder of the community than ever before. There are no more than half a dozen, of which two or three are the property of "summer people".

The Marshes live about half way down "the Gulf" in an old white colonial type home which like so many others in the village has obviously been "added to" during the years so that it rambles in several directions from the center. Huge stones, flat surfaced, spaced, form a rustic sidewalk leading to front and back doors. Solidly built, set in grounds which could be made attractive, the house is badly in need of repair, weather worn and faded.

There is no response to a knock at the front door and I go around to the back, where after a brief wait the door is opened by an old lady wearing house dress, heavy man's sweater and a cap after the fashion of Mrs. Gummidge. She regards me with obvious suspicion as I ask for Mr. Marsh.

"Mr. Marsh is not a business man these days," she says. "You another one of those magazine salesmen? Because if you be, we don't want any."

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I explain my errand, still standing on the doorstep, but she looks only a little less doubtful. "I s'pose you could see him," she says reluctantly, admitting me to the kitchen. The room is neat, but bare, furnished with purely utilitarian objects, chiefest among them a deal table and a squat range no more than two feet high, with a disproportionately big chimney.

"Oh Marsh," calls the old lady, going to the door of an inner room; "somebody else to see you." In response to this announcement "Marsh" comes into the kitchen, a gnarled, bent old man crippled apparently by arthritis or rheumatism. His cheeks are a ruddy contrast to a snow white beard, his hair, white but still comparatively thick is long and unkempt, and upon his feet, in spite of the warmth of the room, are loosely buckled arctics. Unable to move his neck freely, he is forced to bend his upper body in a peculiar contortion in order to see me. Mrs. Marsh explains that I am in search of information on Northfield.

"Can't got any out of me," says Mr. Marsh irascibly. "What do they think I be, all these people comin' 'round, an information [bew-ry?]" He stands over the stove, warming the swollen joints of his hands on the lifter.

"What was it exactly you wanted to know?" says Mrs. Marsh. "You know we hain't lived down here to the village such an awful long time. We had a farm, Mr. Marsh and me, before we moved down here. Oh, yes, we've always lived around these parts, always in Northfield, but not right in the village. There's others better able to tell you what goes on than we be. No, Mr. Marsh never worked in the knife shop. Well, I know some of the people, yes. The Marshalls, and the Masons and the Burleys. They were knifemaking families, came over here from England." (Mr. Marsh, apparently disgusted by his wife's loquaciousness turns and hobbles into the room from which he came.)

"Those people came over from Sheffield, a big city, you know, and comin' over here was like comin' into a howlin' wilderness for them. Miz Marshall told me she honestly expected to see Indians and bears in these parts when she first came here. They were fine

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people, very fine people, the ones I knew. They settled right down here in the village and were well liked by everyone. Some of them moved on, of course, but many of them stayed in Northfield, and bought farms. They worked very hard, working in the shop and on the farm too, some of them.

“They didn't seem to have a great deal of money, there were times when they paid in scrip, down to the factory. I remember Miz Marshall said Mr. Marshall worked here two years before he ever got any cash for his work. Have you been up to see Mr. Gill? He used to be superintendent of the knife shop. He can tell you all about it.

“The Peck family? Well, we know them, of course. Howard and Henry and Will. We never knew the old man so well. Howard? Why, I don't know. I've seen him many a time in that old wagon of his'n. Used to have it piled so high with his junk you couldn't see hide nor hair of him. But he was a very hard workin' man, Howard Peck was. Work seemed to be his main object in life, and he worked all hours of the night. I s'pose you know how they used to call him 'midnight', on account of him callin' on people late at night. Well, that's true, every bit of it. Miz Turner told me one time he come to her house four o'clock in the mornin'. Why don't you go see George Peck, he'd ought to be able to tell you all you want to know.

“Me and Mr. Marsh can't help you much. We never was much for historical stuff. But there's plenty of people around here that should be able to give you information. There's Edie Catlin, right down the road, you been to see her? And Miz Goodwin, and Mr. Humiston, they knew a good bit about Northfield history. Miz Goodwin's always writin' for the papers. Why don't you go see her? My goodness, she knows everything there is to know about Northfield, past, present, and future!”